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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/16/2020  
TAGS: PTER PGOV PREL KCRM KISL KJUS I2  
SUBJECT: AFTER TWO YEARS OF RELATIVE CALM, DEADLY  
EXPLOSIONS SHAKE NAJAF

REF: A. REF A) 2009 BAGHDAD 3090  
    IB. REF B) 2010 BAGHDAD 0109  
    IC. REF C) 2010 BAGHDAD 0110

Classified By: OPA Director Greta Holtz for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

I1. (C) SUMMARY. Early evening bomb attacks rocked the old city of Najaf on January 14, the first major blasts in the city for more than two years. Sources within the provincial government and media initially reported at least two dead and 73 wounded. PRT Team Leader has been in contact with the governor and provincial council chair to offer U.S. assistance. Local authorities have accepted an offer by U.S. forces for explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) and weapons intelligence support. A police investigation, backed by U.S. military experts, is ongoing. Thus far there have been no claims of responsibility for the blasts, although there has been speculation of an uptick in violence during the election campaign. END SUMMARY.

THREE BOMBS WREAK HAVOC IN NAJAF OLD CITY  
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I2. (SBU) In the early evening of January 14, the Najaf Iraqi Police explosive ordinance disposal (EOD) unit reported three explosions in the old city of Najaf within seven minutes of each other, all near the Imam Ali Shrine and a nearby market. The three blasts were all caused by improvised explosive devices (IEDs). (NOTE. Because the last caused the fuel tank of a nearby car to explode, media initially reported mistakenly that the third blast was a car bomb. END NOTE.)

I3. (SBU) Provincial Council Chair Sheikh Fayed al-Shimmeri told PRT Team Leader on January 15 that two persons had been killed, and 73 wounded. Ten of these were seriously wounded and 25 had already left the hospital. Al-Shimmeri noted that the Provincial Government would be providing varying levels of compensation to victims of the dead and injured.

I4. As soon as the blasts occurred, security at IP checkpoints was tightened around the city. (NOTE. PRT will continue to monitor the situation and report additional information. END NOTE.)

USG SUPPORT FOR INVESTIGATION  
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I5. (C) In a late evening conversation with Najaf provincial governor Zurfi on January 15, PRT Team Leader offered condolences and informed him that the U.S. military had offered to provide EOD and forensic assistance to Police Chief MG Kareem. U.S. military EOD team members from FOBs Echo (near Diwaniyah) and Endeavor (where the PRT is based in Najaf) met Kareem and accompanied his officers to the blast sites in the old city. They noted that the Iraqi Police EOD had conducted a blast assessment and cleaned the blast sites. The U.S. EOD Team did not obtain any evidence other than soil samples for evaluation, while the Iraqi police bagged and removed other evidence. The U.S. team saw remnants of

the vehicle involved in the VBIED and viewed all three blast sites. (COMMENT. This was the first time since U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraqi cities on June 30, 2009 that uniformed U.S. soldiers had been in the old city in recent memory, but, as they were invited and escorted by Iraqi police on a cooperative mission, this did not present any problems. When PRT Team Leader asked the governor and PC Chair if there was anything more that the USG could do to help, both responded quickly they were hoping for results from forensic analysis and intelligence cooperation as soon as possible. (Reftel A) END COMMENT)

COMMENT: LONG SPELL OF PEACE NOW BROKEN

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¶6. (C) Najaf has enjoyed a period of relative calm, and there  
Q6. (C) Najaf has enjoyed a period of relative calm, and there  
is no doubt that the vast majority of the population in Najaf  
supports the stability and economic growth and progress that  
Najaf has enjoyed. Najaf is the center of Shi'a spiritual  
and political life. It is hard to imagine any Shi'a group,  
no matter how extreme, carrying out this kind of attack so  
close to the Imam Ali Shrine, one of the most important  
religious sites in the Shi'a tradition. Many have expected  
an uptick in violence with the beginning of the election  
campaign. While no group has claimed responsibility as of  
January 16, some PRT contacts speculate that this act might  
have been connected to IHEC's decision to exclude a number of  
candidates from upcoming national elections (Reftels B, C).  
HILL